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ENHANCING YOUR YACHTING LIFESTYLE

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Uncovering *the* Hidden Treasures of Costa Rica

The Central Pacific Coast offers boaters a magnificent bounty of adventure and unspoiled beauty



YOU CAN DEFINITELY CALL Kevin and Debbie Hopper active boaters. The Hoppers, along with their dog Tate, have logged thousands of miles aboard their 48 Ocean Alexander Sedan named

Island Hopper. Traveling 6,500 miles from St. Petersburg, Florida where they purchased *Island Hopper*, to their hometown of Cincinnati, then back down to south Florida, wintering in Longboat Key and cruising up and down the East Coast, the Hoppers have plenty of stories and adventures to share.

Joy McPeters, President of Marinalife, caught up with the Hoppers in Baltimore after they had completed their

the ICW and beyond

Marinalife members Kevin and Debbie Hopper share their experiences and adventures of cruising the Intra-coastal Waterway

Intra-coastal Waterway (ICW) cruise heading north for the summer. Using Rock Hall's Haven Harbour Marina as their home base allowed them to thoroughly explore the Chesapeake Bay. Aboard *Island Hopper* you immediately feel at home with the warm colors and beautiful teak and holly sole throughout the inside. Joy was welcomed by their dog Tate, a Welsh Springer Spaniel, who loves his treats and



even managed to find one hidden in her bag. Tate began his boating travels 11 years ago as a week old puppy and still today he gets excited when his boat bag gets packed for a trip.

After roughly 35 years on the water Kevin Hopper has earned the title of seasoned boater. His love for the water began in the 1970's as member of a small sailboat racing club and then he bought a Cape Dory moored in Southwest Florida. He has owned a variety of boats both power and sail culminating with the purchase of his current cruising boat with first mate Debbie. Kevin says their Ocean Alexander is the best cruising boat – comfortable and dependable. Kevin and Debbie agree that setting realistic expectations about how they would use the boat was critical to their overall satisfaction. While they may complete the Great Loop over time, they were not interested in continuously cruising for up to a year. Kevin is still working thanks to cell phones and Internet connections, so they return to their home to Cincinnati for 2-3 weeks in between cruising and then happily return to *Island Hopper*. The Hoppers both enjoy exploring new ports and finding unique local restaurants so they can sample regional fare whether it is fried pickles in the mid-west, catfish in the south, low country cuisine

in South Carolina, or steamed crabs in Maryland. “We bought this boat to be a holiday and respite on the water,” says Debbie Hopper. “We also love to entertain our friends aboard *Island Hopper* and have them share the experience of our boating lifestyle.” In fact, they have recently hosted friends Ian and Joan Downs from Scotland who reciprocated by taking the Hoppers on their sailboat throughout the Mediterranean. “The Mediterranean was a totally different experience from boating in the United States”, said Kevin, “they do not even take advanced dockage reservations in most countries except France. You merely show up gesturing or speaking loudly to communicate “How many nights? My Turkish, Greek, Italian and French aren't polished to say the least, but we were always able to communicate the necessities for travel.”

Kevin is a very organized captain who believes that pre-planning for any boat trip is very important for safety and overall enjoyment. For safety he makes sure to have spare parts and he properly maintains his vessel. He also recommends that boaters take the available courses through the US Power Squadron on weather, charts, and boat safety and instruction. He holds a USCG 50 Ton Masters

ABOVE LEFT: ISLAND HOPPER UNDERWAY. ABOVE RIGHT: DEBBIE AT LITTLE PALM ISLAND RIGHT: TATE ON ISLAND HOPPER.

Captain's License. He also uses Cruisersnet.net for up-to-date information on the conditions of the ICW in trouble spots like Georgia and for bridge closing and construction information. To aid his cruise planning he turns to Marinalife, Kevin said, "And of course we use Marinalife to help plan our trip --they are your best friend on the water! With the time necessary to maintain the vessel underway and planing the next days journey our planning time for marina locating and booking was greatly reduced thanks to Marinalife." Marinalife helped put together an itinerary for the Hopper's ICW cruise that took into account their marina preferences and mileage requirements. The itinerary included personalized marina recommendations and reservations at pet-friendly marinas that offer accessibility to good restaurants. "It is huge relief to know that we have access to Marinalife. They have afforded us the opportunity to stay at exclusive clubs and helped us to receive discounts on our dockage at many marinas in beautiful locations with outstanding accommodations," relates Debbie.

The Hopper's trip north on the ICW to the Chesapeake began in May in Miami. It took them about 3 weeks to reach the Chesapeake Bay with a leisurely cruise averaging about 60-70 miles a day. In preparation for this particular cruise they provisioned their boat especially with heavy items like bottled water, soda and wine that could not be easily transported by bike so that if a courtesy car was not available they were not stuck.

They stayed at many of the ICW hot spots including Fernandina Beach; Hilton Head; Charleston, SC; Beaufort,

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SC; Wrightsville Beach; Beaufort, NC; Coinjock, and Portsmouth, VA. They fell in love with Charleston because it combined beautiful architecture, rich history and exquisite food at restaurants such as High Cotton and Magnolias. They also loved the food at many boutique restaurants such as Plums in Beaufort, SC.

The Hoppers believe that marina courtesy cars are a great way to quickly meet your fellow boaters as you all pile in to get to the closest restaurant or grocery store for provisioning. Their courtesy car experiences also made for some good stories including Debbie borrowing a large pick up truck from one very nice marina manager. She got in and was barely able to reach the accelerator.

Kevin and Debbie loved the different experiences and the people they encountered along the ICW. They met so many interesting people along the way including a couple (baby boomers!) on a 17-foot sailboat who were doing the Great Loop. One night, when they were at the same marina, it started to rain heavily. The couple just brought out a tarp for a boom tent and said this was part of their adventure. "It was great to see people totally committed to the adventure of cruising the Great Loop," said Kevin.

The Hoppers are committed cruising boaters and love the cruising lifestyle. It is inspirational to hear them talk with such passion about their adventures on the water and their plans and ideas on where to explore next. Look for *Island Hopper* on the waterways and stay tuned for where their next adventure will take them.

The Hopper's ICW itinerary can be viewed online: www.marinalife.com/icwnorth. ❖

